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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore [Mr. BONILLA]

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

March 21, 1995.

I hereby designate the Honorable HENRY BONILLA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING BUSINESS

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 1995, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority and minority leaders limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Guam [Mr. UNDERWOOD] for 5 minutes.

RESOLUTION BARRING ELIMINATION OR CUT OF COMMISSARY AND EXCHANGE SERVICES

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, next month the Contract With America will reach its 100-day conclusion. At a time when Congress is acting on this contract, I rise to discuss another more enduring and longstanding contract with our active and retired members of the Armed Forces. Under this contract, the Government has agreed to provide commissary and exchange services to active and retired uniformed men and women as a form of indirect pay for

their service and sacrifice. This contract has lasted more than 100 days. In fact, the commissary system dates back to 1825 when it was provided to service military personnel at remote posts where provisions were very expensive. Recent proposals to reduce or eliminate commissary and exchange services would jeopardize this contract.

Today I am introducing a concurrent resolution that will send a message that any elimination or cut in the commissary and exchange systems would be a breach of faith with our active and retired men and women in uniform and that if any reduction is enacted, then other forms of compensation should be paid to offset this loss.

The Department of Defense commissary and exchange system are proven parts of the military compensation package and contribute significantly to the morale and well-being of our men and women in uniform and their families. It is critical in retaining experienced members, it is valuable in recruiting new members, and reduces expenditures by the Federal Government for training and recruiting or for direct compensation which would have to be increased in order to maintain the same retention rate.

Commissaries and exchanges are critical in recruiting and retaining quality personnel and continue to be highlighted as a valuable aspect of military service. Among Armed Forces personnel, commissary privileges consistently rank among the top three benefits of military service, particularly among married personnel, and is one of the major factors in a service member's decision to remain in the armed services. The patron base includes 12 million individuals including active duty military, military retirees, selected and ready reserves, Medal of Honor recipients, 100-percent-disabled veterans, overseas civil service, and all their dependents.

For many of my constituents on Guam and for service men and women throughout the Nation, commissaries and exchanges translate into indirect pay for military families. A reduction would also translate into an erosion for many of quality-of-life facilities available to these individuals and their families. Profits from the exchange system are used to support many quality-of-life improvements such as the operation of youth centers, arts and crafts centers, recreational areas, and child development centers. Eliminating this exchange dividend would result in reductions in the quality-of-life facilities available to our armed services at a time when there have been many concerns raised about these issues.

The resolution that I am introducing today expresses the sense of Congress that first, if the commissary and exchange systems of the DOD are reduced or eliminated, the funds derived from the reduction or elimination should be used to increase other forms of compensation for current and retired members of the Armed Forces.

Second, the resolution states that if exchange stores are reduced or eliminated, funds should be provided by the Department of Defense to upgrade and avoid the erosion of morale, welfare and recreation activities, and other quality-of-life facilities provided to military personnel. The resolution ensures that the indirect pay on which service men and women rely will not be reduced and that the quality-of-life improvements on which the current system relies will not be eroded.

Most importantly, this resolution sends the message that a reduction in commissary and exchange systems would be a breach of faith in current and retired members who have earned this indirect pay through years of faithful service.

Let's make sure that we don't breach the more longstanding contract that

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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